

Genesis – Chapter 18, vs. 1-8

“Right neighborly, ain’t he?”

Not much time has elapsed since chapter 17, perhaps as few as just a few days.

(In both chapters Abraham was promised a son by the next year)

The culture of that day:

1) it was wetter and had more trees and vegetation than today, but it was still hot, and you’d spend the heat of the day sitting in the doorway of the tents to catch the breeze and keep an eye on your stuff.

2) If anybody passed by your way, you were honor bound to treat them right and give them something to eat and drink and a chance to rest.

3) You were supposed to provide more than you promised – that’s why a morsel of bread turns into bread, curds, milk and a calf.

“The righteous say little and do much”

4) The host doesn’t eat with the guests but stands by ready to serve.

5) A sandwich isn’t a sandwich without Miracle Whip, and a meal isn’t a meal without bread.

Abraham goes beyond the usual hospitality:

1) He doesn’t wait for the guests to get to the tent but goes out to meet them.

2) He runs.

In that culture, the older and more distinguished or wealthy a man was, the slower he moved. It was considered disgraceful for such a man to run.

Besides, not only is Abraham all of the above, but he’s also a 99 year-old man who’s just been circumcised not very long ago. Probably sitting at the tent was all he’d been doing for a few days, but now he’s mentioned as running or hurrying not once but three times.

There’s only two other places in the Bible where an older man runs: when Esau goes to meet Jacob and when the father runs to meet the prodigal son.

Perhaps we’re supposed to see Abraham’s increase in godliness since he was told to walk before God and be perfect in the last chapter by seeing how he hurries to deal with these strangers with godly kindness and generosity.

Genesis 18:9-15

The guests ask about Sarah, perhaps to get her attention, which they do.

The promise that Sarah will have a son by next year is repeated, and this may have been the first that Sarah has heard of it and she laughs to herself.

Let’s look at verses 12-15 carefully:

12: and she laughed Sarah within herself saying after my wearing out will it be to me pleasure and my lord he is old

13: and He said Yahweh to Abraham why this she laughed Sarah saying indeed in fact will I give birth when I I am old

14: is it too hard for Yahweh anything to the set time I will return to you according to the time of life and to Sarah son

15: and she lied Sarah, saying not I laughed because she was afraid but He said no rather you laughed

Notice first the reasons that the narrator gives for Sarah’s laughing:

1) we’re too old to make the baby (she’s worn out and her lord is old)

2) it’d be fun to be able to try

but

when the Lord speaks in 13, He goes past these surface reasons and gets to the real heart of the matter: despite the promises of the past Sarah doesn’t believe in Isaac.

To be fair to Sarah, it’s not until after she overheard what she may have thought was just a social pleasantry like “have a good day” and laughed that the head guest is identified as God.

When she hears this she gets scared, after all, she's just dissed the Almighty, and tries to lie her way out of it, but God corrects her.

The application for us is that God still sees past our surface reasons and stated motives and sees into the secret and dark places. We may fool the narrator, we may fool others, we may even fool ourselves, but we haven't snuck it past God and he won't let us get by with it.

All of our secret and hidden thoughts, motives, sins and attitudes are openly displayed before Him and we wind up standing before him like Sarah, with neither excuse or reply.

Another application for us: after the situation and confrontation with Sarah is over, there's no more mention made of it; she's confronted but not rebuked or punished and God no longer dwells on it, instead turning his attention back to the purpose of the visit.

Isn't it a shame that most of us can't let go of things that easily, but insist on dwelling on them and pulling them out again and again, trying to hurt the person and put them in their place.

That's not the way of God, that's not the way of love, and if we insist on behaving like that, then James would tell us that we're liars and that the love of God is not within us. And to take the thought to it's logical New Testament conclusion, if the love of God is not within us, then the Holy Spirit which brings that love and the rest of the fruit isn't within us, and since the Holy Spirit is the surety or downpayment or deposit of our salvation, if He's not within us then one of the lies that we're telling others and ourselves and God is that we're saved.

Genesis 18:16

The three visitors finish their meal and leave. As is the custom of the day, Abraham goes with them.

Genesis 18:17-19 – God talks to himself

Is God just now thinking about what he's going to tell Abraham? Why would He have to think about it at all if he is all-wise and all-knowing already? For that matter, why would he have to go to the cities and look around?

Remember that we've said before that God is so far beyond our comprehension that he has to present himself to us on a level that we can understand and relate to. In this case, we're seeing the story from the point of view of the narrator, who is not above using some dramatic tools to build the tension of the moment. This silent conversation with himself will also point to the unrecorded one that Abraham will have in a few verses.

So this is not an example of God trying to decide what to do but of words recorded for our benefit as well as to build up the drama of the narrative.

The important thing for us to take from these verses is found in verse 19 where God states that it is Abraham's faithful leading his household and heirs in the way of God that will enable God to bring about all the blessings on him and them that He wants to.

Are we or our children missing out on any of the blessings that God wants to give us because of our lack of faithful following Him and guiding them in the way that they should go?

Genesis 18:20-21

Once again, this may sound like God doesn't know what's going on, but this is being said for Abraham's benefit, to give him an opening into verse 22-32, and also as another example of the character of God: He judges fairly and on the basis of what actually is. Just as he didn't rely on Sarah's version of whether or not she laughed and why, he also doesn't rely on the cry that has come up from the victims of Sodom and Gomorrah, but judges according to the actual facts.

Genesis 18:22-32

A key defining moment in the Jewish religion and in our own concept of God.

vs. 22b – "but Abraham stood before the Lord"

This is where there's a silent conversation going on in the mind of Abraham that we're not given but can deduce. If you've ever stood before a superior: a parent, a boss, an officer, an elder or whoever, and have had to decide whether or not to challenge or contradict or bargain with them

over some point, then you know what Abraham was doing as he stood before the Lord.

Should he speak or not?
How should he approach it?
Will God listen or grow angry?
Is it his place to question?

These are the type of things that went through your mind as you stood before your whoever. Abraham makes his decision and draws near to God to question His behavior on the basis of His own nature. This has remained a central tenet of Judaism to this day.

The thing that we can see about the nature of God revealed in this passage is that our God is different from the other gods that Abraham grew up with and found himself surrounded by. They were unpredictable and did things on whims and you could never be sure if you were pleasing them or not or what they'd do next or why.

Abraham saw his God and ours as predictable in the sense that He was consistent in His love, mercy and judgment and could be questioned and counted on to always do the right thing.

He is not predictable in the sense that we can figure Him out and understand what He's doing or that we can force Him to have to do certain things by rituals or bargains or gifts.

Genesis 18:32-33

Abraham has done all that he can do. If he cuts his number by ten again he'll be asking for the city to be spared for the sake of none righteous.

He goes back to his tent to wait and see what happens. It's all in Lot's hands now. He'll assume that Lot is righteous and that his wife and two daughters are as well. That's four of the ten, and if Lot has selected two righteous men for his sons-in-law, then that's six of the ten.

Surely he's managed to influence just four other people in all the time that he's been there.

What about us?

If we were Lot, would we have been able to have saved the city from destruction?

Would we have been able to keep ourselves and our families righteous in the middle of all the wickedness?

Would we have been able to have influenced any other people so that they would have been counted as righteous?

If our righteousness and our influence on our neighbors were the only thing standing between the town and judgment, could we save it and wind up being the toast of the town or is the town toast?